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ABSTRACT

If rural communities are to remain viable, rural schools must seek ways to allow all students to learn, especially those "at risk" or with mild learning disabilities. Research has shown that many children with mild learning disabilities have faulty reading strategies and academic behaviors that interfere with reading comprehension and the solution of math word problems. With continuing failure, such students lose self-esteem and avoid reading. Aimed at providing students with better reading strategies, RIDD (Read, Imagine, Decide, and Do) consists of four steps: (1) read the passage from the first capital to the last end mark without stopping (in order to promote more efficient decoding); (2) imagine, or make a mental picture of what you have read (in order to focus on the concept and self-monitor comprehension); (3) decide what to do; and (4) do the work. Two resource room teachers taught the RIDD strategy to 20 rural secondary students with learning disabilities or mild mental retardation. After 3 weeks, the students in one classroom showed a significant improvement in academic performance. The teachers also reported increased student interest and motivation. (SV)

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The Effects of Using a Cross-Content Learning Strategy; Read, Imagine, Decide, and Do (RIDD) on the Academic Performance of Rural Secondary Students with Mild Learning and Behavior Disorders

In 1991, DeYoung made an interesting observation. Children in rural areas of America may be considered "at risk". He stated that at risk children, at both the elementary and secondary levels, are typically identified as poor academic achievers and/or those who may drop out of school prior to learning the skills necessary to successfully enter adult life in the U.S. DeYoung further noted that the growing body of rural education literature and social science literature focusing on school effectiveness presents some compelling arguments which suggest that many, if not most, rural students in America may be "at risk", assuming that school completion and school success are desired goals of American educators.

Miller (1993) posited that rural community viability becomes threatened as the rural population decreases with the out migration of the young, and often better-educated work force. The author further noted that the vast majority of these rural migrants resettle in metropolitan areas, enlarging the population and straining the existing infrastructure. This population shift creates a situation of double jeopardy. Miller continued to note that while metropolitan areas, swollen to capacity, choke on the rapid growth, rural communities lose their citizens and suffer from social and economic malnutrition. To add to these difficulties, Swanson and Butler (1988) posited that dropout rates tend to be higher in rural areas than in metropolitan areas. Miller (1993) also stated that higher paying industries are also less likely to locate in areas where they will not be able to provide a skilled work force.

Along with these troubling statements, there are some words of encouragement. It seems that the rural poor are more likely to own their own homes, pay less to raise their children and have a slightly lower annual cost of living (constructed from U.S. Congress, 1989). There also seems to be a sense of unity in rural areas that may be less strong in metropolitan America. The community survives because people have such a strong desire to live there and do something about it (Miller, 1991).

A further advantage to rural areas is "intergenerational closure" (Coleman, 1987). Coleman used this term to describe a network whereby generations of families have grown up in close proximity and often communicate with the parents of a child who is experiencing difficulty. Miller (1991), however, noted that this integrated closure has its drawbacks as well as advantages. There is a lack of exclusivity and a separatist attitude that can isolate the child from the outside world. Coleman (1987) posited that the child loses one kind of opportunity by remaining embedded within the narrow constraints of the community and gains another kind-- the opportunity to have warmth, respect, and

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satisfaction of a member of the community as an adult. Kohlenburg and Kohlenburg (1991), while studying rural America, added that "Often we were impressed, sometimes we were awestruck, at the almost casual acceptance of the idea that it is *necessary* to care for one's neighbors, friends, and family members. Such attitudes are not foreign in cities, but they are not reinforced by the circumstances of urban life."

It would seem, that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, but American rural communities are facing great distress. More and more young people are leaving rural areas for greater economic opportunities in urban areas (Coleman, 1987). Therefore, rural educators are faced with even a greater set of difficulties than those in metropolitan areas. If the school is to provide the community with a strong work force, an aggressive middle class, and a populous that is made up of individuals who have adequate self-esteem and self efficacy, a conscious effort must be made by educators to find ways that will allow **all** students, especially those "at risk" and those with mild learning disabilities, to develop the abilities that will enhance such characteristics.

It is the purpose of this paper to present information concerning a cross-content learning and teaching strategy. This process is one that can assist students and teachers to develop self-esteem and self-efficacy within the academic setting. A further aim is to provide instruction al guidance within the framework of the strategy.

The Development of Read, Imagine, Decide, and Do (RIDD)

Teachers who have been in the field of learning disabilities noticed that many students do not experience success, even when the material presented is on the appropriate reading level. The teachers often reported hearing comments such as, "I can't even do this baby stuff."

In an effort to help students find ways to achieve success, the researcher observed how they performed while completing academic tasks. A number of common behaviors became obvious, particularly in the area of reading directions. First, students would stop reading at the end of a line of print, rather than at the end of the instructions. This may be related to the fact that students who are young or inexperienced readers do not understand that written text is supposed to make sense (Garner, 1991). Second, students would often scan the information to look for indicator words such as "circle" or "underline" without noticing *what* to circle or underline. A third behavior was that students would begin a particular activity without reading the directions at all and assume that the exercise would be exactly the same as that modeled by the teacher.

Another difficulty that students commonly faced was in the area of math. Smith and Rivera (1991) stated that a number of studies have been conducted in the area of word problems. These works have produced evidence that students with learning disabilities have more difficulty than average- and high-ability students in determining the appropriate operation and algorithm when solving word problems. Many times, teachers observed that their students presupposed word problems would include only one kind of

procedure. The students would begin to add, subtract, multiply or divide the numbers listed within problem. With some elementary math books, this method works well, but in more advanced texts, the students produced incorrect answers even though the math they completed on their papers was done properly. Failing at math that is generally on a fourth or fifth grade level for a student in high school (Smith & Rivera, 1991) can cause a decrease in self esteem because students are very aware when they are not in the same course of study as their peers.

Reading in content areas produced a great deal of difficulty for students with learning disabilities. There were several behaviors that were documented both in the literature and by classroom teachers. First, in reading, inexperienced readers have an illusion that comprehension means decoding successfully, and fast (Baker, 1985). Baker further noted that young or poor readers tended to rely on lexical evaluation of a text, which is placing the main emphasis of a text on the single word rather than the relationship of words and sentences to the entire text. The educators frequently stated that students would pronounce every word within a text perfectly, but would have no concept of the meaning within the passage. In 1993, Manzo and Manzo defined reading as the act of *simultaneously* reading the lines, reading between the lines, and reading beyond the lines. In other words, it is important for readers to reconstruct the author's basic message, reconstruct the implied message, and make judgements about the significance of the author's message. If students only read the lines, the majority of the meaning of a text is lost.

Reading in general, whether it is in history, science, literature, or math has elicited poor performance from students with learning disabilities. When students find reading a constant challenge, they do not enjoy the activity; therefore, they avoid it as much as possible. Since students in rural areas are faced with a lack of cultural and social diversity (Coleman, 1987), reading is important in providing the knowledge necessary to increase academic efficiency. Any skill that is not used will deteriorate. Reading is certainly no different. Some teachers noted that when students were successful on their reading level, they were less fearful of reading and began to read more often. Borkowski (1987) stated that without high self-esteem, both children and adults are less likely to employ strategies for learning. As self-esteem and self-efficacy increase, the fear to use strategies deceases. As students increase their self-esteem, they will become better members of a community as well as better members of an academic class. Therefore, it seemed important to develop a strategy that would allow students to experience success, and some fun, while learning.

Read, Imagine, Decide, and Do (RIDD): steps of the Strategy

After looking at the behaviors of students, and finding some commonalities, the steps of RIDD began to emerge. Since students who are on lower reading levels than their peers often experience difficulty even within that level, the first decision was to make RIDD a strategy that would increase students' reading *efficiency*. As noted earlier, when students experience success, they are likely to incorporate more efficient learning strategies. Therefore, the first step, **R, is read the passage from the first capital to the**

last end mark *without stopping*. This was based on Garner's (1991) observation that rapid, accurate, and automatic decoding reduces memory demands for word identification, releasing memory resources for construction of meaning. Of course, rapid decoding is not the only key to good reading. As Garner continued, decoding does not ensure that meaning will be constructed successfully. There are certainly other factors that produce comprehension failure. Anderson (1985) noted, however, when children who are just learning to read engage in particularly effortful, inefficient decoding, their comprehension is inevitably hampered.

Reading without stopping is important. That means the students will need to decide, ahead of time, what they will call a word that is foreign to them. It is important to note here, that to begin this strategy, students must be at their independent level of reading. That is, the level in which they experience the greatest amount of success. When this is the starting place, there will be few words that students do not know. Also, the context cues will be strong enough to assist the students in constructing meaning within the passage. Good readers often skip words within a text and continue reading. Some readers have a "pet word" they insert, For instance, some good readers will use "Whatever", or "Big word". This may be easier than just leaving an empty space. Deciding what to do about an unknown word before reading begins also allows students to have some power over their own learning.

It is important that the students have a concept of how much will be read before it is time to stop. Actually saying, or thinking, "I'm going to read from the first capital to the last end mark." helps students focus on the entire task rather than just one line at a time. This is especially relevant in reading directions or test items. The teacher may decide, at first, how much a student will read before going on to the next step. Then, as students become more proficient, that decision becomes their own.

The second step **I** is **imagine or make a mental picture of what you have read.** A number of researchers have examined visual imagery as a learning strategy (Hodges, 1992; Darch & Simpson, 1990; Mastropieri, 1988; Levin, 1983; Peters & Levin, 1986). They indicated that visual imagery has the potential for assisting students with learning disabilities. However, as Darch and Simpson (1990) found, visual imagery alone, when teaching rural students with learning disabilities is not effective. Teaching explicit rules for learning information must not be ignored. Therefore, even though imagery is effective, and sometimes, fun, it is only a part of the teaching-learning process.

This step has two purposes. One is to assist students focus on the concept and to provide a self-monitoring procedure. If a student is reading directions for the completion of an exercise in language arts and cannot imagine what his or her paper will look like, comprehension of the text has not occurred. When first presenting this step, the teacher needs to explain that everyone has difficulty sometimes. Students can decide, ahead of time, what to do if they cannot make a mental picture of what they read. As Brown (1980) noted, when comprehension failure is noted, it is considered to be metacognitive

success. If children do not notice that they are not understanding text information, they are unlikely to seek a strategic remedy (Garner, 1987).

The third step, **D, decide what to do.** first emerged because of math word problems. When students read the entire problem without stopping and got a mental picture of the situation, they could decide what to do and in what order the steps were to be completed. In reading directions, students looked through to see exactly what they were supposed to do. In reading content areas, if students did imagine the meaning, they could decide to continue reading.

The fourth step is **D-do the work.** Once again, this step emerged through math word problems and extended to other content areas. It is during this step that the students actually do what was decided upon in the third step. Often, students would attempt to read a problem and want to immediately start writing down numbers. By adding the last step, they can see that there are things that can be done in between reading and writing that lead to success. It is interesting to note here that as students used RIDD when doing math problems, they often commented that they liked it because only the last step that had any work involved. This seems to lend support to the idea that students with learning disabilities do not consider metacognitive processes important; rather, they only see the written product as evidence of successful learning.

The following is a report of an ongoing study in which the subjects are rural secondary students identified as students with learning disabilities in a Southeastern state. The main purpose of the study is to determine if the use of Read, Imagine, Decide and Do strategy will effect the academic performance of these students in one grading period. The discussion will include the methods, procedures, and results obtained over a three week period. The discussion will include the methods and procedures as well as present some results from preliminary data that has been obtained from the teachers who are using the strategy.

Methods and Procedures

The researcher provided the two teachers who volunteered to participate in the study with a one hour training session in which the researcher and the teachers examined the scripting of the RIDD strategy. The investigator answered any questions the teachers had and provided modeling on how to integrate the steps of RIDD into regular instruction.

The teachers, who instruct students with learning disabilities or students with mild mental retardation, chose the students to participate. Five females and nine males, ranging in age from 13 to 19 and in IQ from 60 to 72 make up classroom A (n = 14). The age range of the students in the other classroom , B (n = 6), is form 10 to 13 and the IQ ranges from 70 to 93. All of the students in classroom B are male.

The teachers introduced the strategy to the students in one fifteen minute session and began modeling the steps during regular daily instruction. In the second lesson, the

teachers demonstrated how to use the strategy for reading directions. In the third lesson, the teachers illustrate how to use RIDD in content areas of the curriculum. In lessons four and five, the teachers provided guided and independent practice. The teachers encourage the students to use the strategy in other classrooms and examine the Learner Helper Forms (see Figure 1). Presently, the students are involved in the independent practice stage of strategy instruction.

Figure 1 The Learner Helper Form

Read, Imagine, Decide and Do (RIDD) Learner Helper Form
Check all of the things you did when you used RIDD
I read from the first capital to the last end mark without stopping.
I imagined and got a mental picture
(Write down what you imagined. Remember, spelling and writing are not as important here as thinking)
I decided what to do.
(Write down what you decided to do and why)
I did the work
Jackson, 1996

Preliminary Results

The reported data was taken after three weeks. This data must be considered inconclusive because it does not include an entire grading period. In classroom A, the students' mean score at the beginning of the six weeks was 71.5. After three weeks, the mean score was 85.4. This did provide a significant difference in a one tailed τ-test; however, no data on the control group were available. In classroom B, the mean score was 77.8 and the post mean was 79.4. That teacher did provide data from a control group. The students in the control are matched with the students in the experimental group on the basis of age, IQ, and classes in the general education setting. Two male students compose the control. Neither of the members of the control had any statistically significant change in academic performance over the three week period. Even though the entire mean differences between the control and experimental group did not indicate a significant gain, one of the scores form the experimental group did show a significant positive change ($\alpha = .05$).

The researcher also obtained qualitative data. The teachers who are using the strategy stated that the students are more motivated while they are in the resource room setting. They noted that students are showing more interest in the texts anc completing more assignments. Additionally, one teacher reported that one of her students said he liked the strategy because he did not always have to think exactly the way the teacher did to make sense of some of his assignments. Further evidence of the usefulness of RIDD is indicated in that other teachers in the school have expressed interest in using the strategy with their students who have not been identified as having learning problems, but are having difficulty in the general education setting.

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